

The Fight of Violence against Women in The Bahamas

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Abstract

Violence against women is a pernicious and critical crime but is continually being neglected in The Bahamas. It ruins lives, destroys families, causes post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Low self-esteem even death in some cases. This paper observes how violence against women in The Bahamas is being overlooked and the need to be criminalized with new legislation. Through a multifaceted study of both online and offline sources. By investigative use of these several studies, we elucidate the problem of violence against women in The Bahamas. Data has been collected from journals, books, newspapers, and articles with statistics. This paper also proposes current issues with current legislation and how it is affecting women in The Bahamas. Ultimately, I recommend that additional research be conducted in the area of violence against women in The Bahamas, because of the gap of information with university's protocols in reference to the library.

Keywords: Violence Against Women, The Bahamas, Legislation, Effects.

The Fight of Violence against Women in The Bahamas

Can you imagine being a victim all your life of humiliation, cruelty, exploitation, oppression, degraded, acts of violence and have often been treated as second class citizens? This is the reality for many females in The Bahamas today. Hence according to The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) violence against women is defined as, “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Gender-based violence is any violence inflicted on a person because of their sex.” Gender is characterized as the socially made behavior, roles, attributes, and activities that a particular culture perceives for women and men. Different behaviors and roles may contribute to gender inequalities, which are differences between men and women that constantly favor one group. As a result, such discrepancies may result in inequities between men and women in terms of political, social, and economic position, as well as interactions. Therefore, the frailer gender remains vulnerable to coercion and cruelty at the hands of the more powerful gender. Such authority and exploitation may emerge as an absence of availability to societal resources such as security, sexual crimes, exploitation because of non-violent and violent acts against the individual. These crimes are the consequence of a variety of factors, including gender inequality, power struggles, insufficient laws and rights, cultural

differences, and so on. Women are statistically more likely to be victims of these violent acts. This violence is a severe problem in the Bahamas, and it is a serious violation of human rights. Therefore, I strongly recommend that new legislation be created and enforced to protect the women in the Bahamas against gender-based violence.

History Of Violence against Women in The Bahamas

To comprehend the distress that women in the Bahamas has faced at the hands of gender-based violence, it is critical to first understand where it all started. Throughout history for as long as anybody can remember, women have fought to be heard and to be treated equally to men. Women have been simply compartmentalized in history as the child bearers, mothers, and homemakers while they are so much more than those labels. Over time, women have faced numerous inequalities at the hands of men that can be traced back generations. For instance, ranging back to the creation of the constitution which states, "Bahamian women cannot pass their citizenship on to their overseas-born children at birth, if they are married to a non-Bahamian". Compared to married Bahamian men that can pass their nationality to both parties. The section that concerns the institution of marriage, "unmarried Bahamian women automatically pass their citizenship on to their children at birth" (the constitution). Unfortunately, citizenship passing from parent to child are far more complicated by this clause. Where unmarried Bahamian women are classified as "fathers" under this section for the purposes of passing on their nationality to their children. Which shows the variation between male and female, married and unmarried, that currently exist in the Bahamas.

According to the United Nations Human Rights Office of High Commissioner (2014), "Gender stereotyping is the practice of ascribing to an individual woman or man specific attributes, characteristics, or roles by reason only of her or his membership in the social group of women or men." Harmful deep-rooted gender stereotyping regarding the identities of women and men in Bahamian society has played a vital role in the increase of gender inequality. How traditional attitudes by which women are regarded as subordinate to men perpetuate widespread practice involving violence and coercion. Where women are deemed as family caretakers and men are Head of the household or the breadwinners. Even in the Bahamian society according to The Commonwealth of The Bahamas Ministry of Social Services and Community Development (2015), "boys are socialized to be dominant, aggressive and in control and girls socialized to be obedient, passive and submissive." This mindset has led to numerous difficulties for women in the Bahamas, even the stereotype of women as the sexual property of men. Which is a clear violation of human rights but has been culturally acceptable and instilled in men that it is 'okay' to be violent towards women. Although gender roles are shifting, we can see the link between masculinity, aggressiveness, and dominance by looking at the rise in male-on-male violence in our daily media. While these types of conduct and behaviors may be traced back generations, the fight for women's rights is far from ended.

Recent Oppression of Women in the Bahamas

Violence against women is a result of historical power struggles between men and women, which has led to male dominance and discrimination against women. As well as the prevention of women's full advancement, and that violence against women is one of the most important social mechanisms by which women are forced into a weaker position in comparison to men. The oppression of women in The Bahamas is overwhelming and has always been an issue. The government planned to assist in correcting gender inequality by passing four new bills. On June 7, the Bahamas held a public referendum to abolish gender discrimination and incorporate the idea of equality between men and women in the Bahamian Constitution. Three of the four referendum legislation related to ensuring that Bahamian women and men are treated equally when it comes to giving nationality to their children and spouses.

The four Bills intend to make the following changes:

- BILL 1: Allow Bahamian mothers married to non-Bahamian men to pass citizenship on to their children born outside of The Bahamas (the way Bahamian men currently can)
- BILL 2: Allow non-Bahamian men married to Bahamian women the right to apply for Bahamian citizenship (the way wives of Bahamian men currently can)
- BILL 3: Allow Bahamian men to pass on citizenship to their children born outside of wedlock (the way Bahamian woman currently can)

- BILL 4: Add “sex” to the definition of discrimination (where race, place of origin, color, and creed are currently listed)

Majority of the voters chose no, for numerous reasons many religious leaders were in full support of the “no” campaign. As stated by Bishop Hanchell, of Great Commission Ministries, “We must protect our women from economic refugees seeking legal status,”. Even through the fight of equality men are still undermining and belittling women about their marital decisions.

Marital Rape Legislation

In the creation of the Domestic Violence Protection Orders Act, which was implemented on 1st December ,2008 for protection against Domestic violence and for other related matters. Many of the important parts of this act focuses on abuse against women and adolescents. Moreover, according to the Domestic Violence Protection Orders Act (2008), “domestic violence” includes physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological or financial abuse committed by a person against a spouse, partner, child, any other person who is a member of the household or dependant;”. According to various sources, Marital Rape is defined as "Sexual Intercourse between legal spouse where that sexual activity is performed or caused without the consent of other spouses." In general, it is regarded as a kind of domestic violence and/or abuse. As stated in Statute Law of The Bahamas (2006), “that person is not guilty of the offence if — at the time of the commission of

the act, he was the spouse of the person with whom the act was committed.” There is no law in the Bahamas that criminalizes nonconsensual sexual intercourse amongst husband and wife. Thus, single women and men have legal protections that married women and men do not have. Outside of the recognized legal grounds for filing a complaint against a spouse for nonsexual violence (e.g., Battery and Assault), the legislation gives no such protection in the Marital Union for nonconsensual sexual intercourse. As a result, a woman is forbidden to testify against her husband in a rape case and is only able to make a physical violence claim. This is a complete violation of human rights, mainly supported by Christians based on Genesis 2:24 which states, “two become one”. Therefore, raping a spouse is illegal since her or his body is "lawfully" deemed to be at one with his or her spouse for sexual activity. I strongly agree that a wife accusing her husband of rape is no different than a girlfriend accusing her boyfriend, or even a woman accusing her male friend. Without adequate proof against him, the individual will not be convicted. An accusation does not automatically result in incarceration. All proven rapes should be punishable by law regardless of who committed the crime.

Statistics On Current Legislation

According to the Commissioner of Police Paul Rolle, “domestic violence incidents increased substantially in 2021”. But there still isn’t nothing being done to prevent these crimes from happening because it isn’t considered to be a ‘serious crime’ merely categorized as a part of various

types of 'quality of life' offenses. This crime according to the statistics, "has increased by 19 percent, with 3,283 incidents in 2021 compared to 2,754 in 2020. There were eight domestic-related murders, five attempted murders, 792 assaults, 71 assaults with a deadly weapon, 16 stabbings and one shooting, among other incidents." In the Bahamas, there are more domestic violence victims compared to homicide victims keeping mind these are only the reported incidents. However, it is still being overlooked by the government while Bahamian women face never ending suffering at the hands of men. The one place women and girls are supposed to be the safest and hide from the hardships of the outside world. Is deemed as the greatest threat, in their own homes they aren't safe. They are abused, mistreated, violated, and raped but society punishes them for the actions of men.

Violence Against Women Cases

Say their names, "Nellie Brown-Cox, Alicia Sawyer, Heavenly Terveus, Carissa Culmer, Indera Barry, Denise Adderley, Yvonne Adderley, Jeffonya Rolle, Carrol Jean Jacques, Elex Tina McKenzie, Erica Ward, and Chackara Rahming." Phenomenal and diligent females that were killed by the hands of their lovers, husbands, child fathers and close male friends. Since not all of these murders were solved, it's difficult to say whether these were random acts of violence or premeditated murders. These fatalities could only be the tip of the iceberg. Robin Roberts (2013), stated that, "We are seeing women who are coming in who have injured or assaulted in worse ways. Women who are being choked, women have acid thrown in their

faces, women who are raped, murdered - even our six-year-old little daughters.” Not only are individuals deliberately ignoring gender-based violence in the home and on the street, but law enforcement and the justice system are completely eliminating it from the actuality of the issue and its impact on people. Even Police Superintendent Chaswell Hanna (2022) claimed, “the media is exaggerating in its reporting on crime. He said murders are tragic, regardless of gender. He went on to repeatedly use “female” instead of “woman” — or “girl,” where appropriate — and said the police have not had investigations that found women or girls were killed because of their gender.” Although, the harsh reality is that many women are victims of abuse that goes unrecognized or is magnified by the fear of speaking out because of being stigmatized by the justice systems. There are many cases currently where women have been killed or abused even after making reports to the police station which failed to protect them. Moreover, the murder of Heavenly Terveus was gender-based violence where she had received threats, was reportedly holding her infant when she was shot dead by her fiancé, and he had reportedly shot at Terveus’ sister in 2021. Even after making numerous reports to the police station and nothing was ever done to protect her against her abuser. As stated in the Domestic Violence Protection Orders Act (2008), “The police officer in charge of every police station shall ensure that all records of domestic violence complaints and cases are properly compiled so as to facilitate easy reference to data.” But in this case, the domestic violence complaints were never found. Next, the

death of Carissa Culmer was gender-based violence. She made public pleas for help, and she did not receive the type and level of support she needed. She died by suicide. There are numerous additional names, stories, and cases that have been forgotten. At times these deaths are acknowledged as end results of domestic violence, but rarely identified as gender-based violence. As stated by Alicia Wallace (2022), "This is not because those are not appropriate terms, but because there is a lack of knowledge, unwillingness to learn, and insufficient laws, policies, programmes, services, and training for first responders." This is why I strongly believe that new legislation is needed to assist in resolving the issue of gender-based violence in the Bahamas.

Stands Against Gender-Based Violence Led by Women

Chair Charlene Paul(2022), "Meanwhile, and in more recent times, we've seen it play out and women are dying and being abused, are being misused, and so, we're saying enough is enough." In the past, violence against women was not considered an issue worthy of international attention or concern, victims of violence suffered in silence, with little public recognition. This began to change in the 1980's as women's groups organized locally and internationally to demand attention to the physical, psychological, and economic abuse of women. Following this, women in the bahamas are finally speaking out about gender based violence and are creating organizations to eliminate violence against women. Organizations such as, Caribbean Women in Leadership(2019), which are implemented

across the Caribbean specifically to foster young women's interest in public leadership. The programme is designed to support young women leaders in building knowledge, skills, and networks necessary for their work as current and future change-makers in the region. Next, Celebrating Women International (CWI) which is a group of women's advocates in The Bahamas, United States and Canada, that supports women's rights. Their main focus is to celebrate, honor and unite women worldwide so they can positively thrive in and change their world. There are numerous other non profit organizations created by women to fight against Gender based violence and empower younger generations to come. Women groups are now are calling for remediation efforts to address the ongoing and increasing violence against women and Children. The savage acts happening along with so many other reported cases of violence against women and children, have created an environment of great terror, distress and anxiety among women in The Bahamas. Women are no longer being silenced, they are fighting for "Legislation to support a Gender-Based Violence Authority, more Shelters and safe houses for abuse victims. Additional courts and resources to urgently address the ongoing and increasing violence against women and children. Enactment of the Gender-Based Violence Bill to remove discriminatory roadblocks and counterproductive archaic practices" and so much more (Chair Charlene Paul, 2022). Gender-Based Violence should not be viewed solely as a female

problem. It impacts the entire world and women advocates aren't stopping until changes are made.

Opposing View

My opponents may argue that gender-based violence is a result of promiscuity and is simply triggered. That married women are their husbands' property and are given the rights to have sex with her whenever he desires. Also, if women walk alone late at night and wear revealing clothes, "they were looking for it." On the one hand, others believe that your gender has no impact on how you are discriminated against. Pondering on this, society has briskly digested women in all of history and They are still facing difficulties in the fight of equality. Merely being labeled as second class citizens just taking whatever bumps and bruises that comes their way. Can you imagine being sexualized based on the clothes you wear? Being the property of your spouse? Completing the same job as a man and some how still receiving less? Being abused, raped, murdered and not being able to tell a soul based on the cultural stereotypes? But the real question is how could the cries of women and girls go unheard for so long? Before a male ever decides to say that women are equal to men simply take a look at the amendments to the constitution and how long it took and is taking to be corrected.

Aftermath Of Gender Based Violence

The impact of violence against women leaves a lifelong impact not only on the women but families and children. This violence has been linked to negative social, medical, physical, and psychological issues that affect women of reproductive age, and it poses a serious threat to women's health. Gender-based violence is a better term for violence against women, and it can lead to increased morbidity and mortality among women who are impacted. According to National Task Force For Gender-Based Violence(2015), "Depending on the type and severity of the assault, women may face health, mental, physical, or emotional issues, which may lead to substance misuse, alcohol abuse, or even suicidal tendencies, further compromising their health." Henceforth, No parent anticipates the death of a child. Parents aren't expected to live longer than their offspring. This is the sad reality for numerous mothers of abused daughters such as, Heavenly Terveus. Can you even imagine the pain and grief she had to endure and the rest of the family? The loss of her daughter's ambitions and dreams, the potential that will never be realized, and the experiences that she will never share. The only piece of her daughter's precious life remaining is her grandson, which was shared with the person that ended her daughter's life. Imagine having to tell your grandchild memories of his loving mother, reliving that past and hurt day after day. Imagine her son

growing up without a mother or father because of lack of protection against gender based violence.

In final analysis, I strongly recommend that new legislation be created and enforced to protect the women in the Bahamas against gender-based violence. Violence against women must be viewed as a socioeconomic issue rather than a private family matter that is easily overlooked. As an issue that is affecting our society's general standard of living, it requires adequate attention from numerous organizations. It is not merely a women's concern, but a problem that directly threatens the entire world.

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